

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8517

C O N F I D E N T I A L BLANTYRE 0154

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, FOR, XA, MI

SUBJ: MALAWI: REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINTS STUDY

REF: STATE 020621

1. GOM'S TWO-BATTALION (APPROXIMATELY 2,500 MEN), PRIMARILY INFANTRY ARMY IS BY ANY STANDARDS SMALL AND LACKS SOPHISTICATED EQUIPMENT. MALAWI HAS NO AIR FORCE OR NAVY. GOM EXERCISES RESTRAINT IN INCREASING MILITARY CAPABILITY, WITH TOTAL MILITARY BUDGET AFTER 11 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE ONLY 5.6 MILLION DOLLARS OR 3.6 PERCENT OF TOTAL BUDGET. (MALAWI IS ONE OF 25 POOREST COUNTRIES IN WORLD WITH PER CAPITA ANNUAL INCOME OF \$125.)

2. GOM MILITARY POLICY, AS WELL AS ALL OTHER POLICIES, PERSONALLY SET BY LIFE PRESIDENT BANDA WHO IS ANTI-COMMUNIST AND WHO EMPHASIZES NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ABOVE ALL ELSE. COUNTRY'S FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS ARE MINIMAL.

3. THUS, THERE LITTLE RELEVANCE TO MALAWI IN LOOKING FOR WAYS US OR OTHERS MIGHT RESTRAIN TRANSFER OF CONVENTIONAL ARMS GIVEN PRESENT GOM PRIORITIES AND BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS.

4. HOWEVER, SHOULD BUDGETARY RESTRAINTS BE LESSENED, IT SEEMS PROBABLE GOM WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO RESIST PRESSURE FROM MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT TO ACQUIRE TANKS, MODERN AIRCRAFT, ETC.,
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ALONG WITH APPROPRIATE TRAINING. IN LARGE MEASURE THIS WOULD

BE RESPONSE TO LARGER AND MORE SOPHISTICATED MILITARY ESTABLISHMENTS OF CONTIGUOUS STATES.

5. DONORS OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT TO MALAWI WOULD PROBABLY BE WESTERN; IT IS DIFFICULT TO CONCEIVE LIFE PRESIDENT BANDA ACCEPTING ARMS FROM EASTERN OR ARAB COUNTRIES IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES.

6. BUT GIVEN MALAWI'S NON-STRATEGIC LOCATION AND LACK OF MINERAL RESOURCES, IT WOULD BE FARFETCHED TO ASSUME THERE WOULD BE ANY INTENTION BY A WESTERN COUNTRY TO PUSH MILITARY EQUIPMENT UPON MALAWI WHICH HERETOFORE HAS MINIMIZED ITS DEFENSE COMMITMENT AND FOREIGN RELATIONS. HOWEVER, SHOULD SUCH INTENT EXIST AGAINST ALL ODDS, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES A USEFUL LEVER OF RESTRAINT WOULD BE PROMISE OF INCREASED ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE GIVEN BANDA'S MAIN THRUST OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THE EMBASSY DOES NOT BELIEVE AN OFFER OF POLITICAL OR SECURITY GUARANTEES WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO BANDA GIVEN HIS POLICY OF STAYING FREE OF ISSUES NOT OF DIRECT CONCERN TO MALAWI. BANDA IS INDEPENDENT STATESMAN WHO CHOOSES HIS ISSUES WITHIN PERSPECTIVE OF "MALAWI FIRST" ALTHOUGH HE HAS TAKEN STANDS OF PRINCIPLE AGAINST POPULAR THIRD WORLD TRENDS IF CONVINCED CAUSE IS RIGHT; WITNESS MALAWI'S VOTES IN SUPPOR OF US ON KOREAN AND ANTI-ZIONIST RESOLUTIONS AT 30TH UNGA.

7. IN SUM, BANDA WOULD NOT BE ACCESSIBLE TO PRESSURES, OTHER THAN ECONOMIC INCENTIVES, FOR PURPOSE OF RESTRAINING MILITARY BUILDUP, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY IT WOULD APPEAR THERE WOULD BE LITTLE OR NO MOTIVE TO AUGMENT SUBSTANTIALY MALAWI MILITARY ON PART OF GOM OR POTENTIAL DONORS.
STEVENSON

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